



المجلس العربي
Arab Council



Communication on child recruitment in Yemen

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Working group on enforced or involuntary disappearances; Special rapporteur on the right to education; Special rapporteur on the right to food; Special rapporteur on the right of everyone to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; Special rapporteur on the right to development; Special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights; Special rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence.

Excellencies,

This communication sheds light on the policy of the parties to the conflict in recruiting children in Yemen, particularly the Houthis, taking advantage of the deterioration of the Yemeni economy, extreme poverty, the deterioration of the level of services, and tribal fanaticism. This has led to thousands of students leaving their schools due to conscription, thousands of children pushed to the front lines due to financial need, tribal solidarity, and other reasons, where children pay a heavy price, which will continue to accumulate for years to come and will affect the recovery of Yemeni society. Aside from being a war crime under international law, using Yemen's children as fuel for a seemingly endless war will deprive them and their country of the opportunity to build a modern economy that can guarantee a decent standard of living and a state that upholds the rights of its people.

The child recruitment policy pursued by the parties to the conflict in Yemen, particularly the Houthis, involves severe violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. The parties to the conflict take advantage of the deteriorating economic reality, extreme poverty, and the lack of development to continue recruiting children, which contradicts the child's best interest enshrined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. This policy leads to severe violations of their right to life, the right to education, and the right to enjoy the highest standard of physical and mental health, and the enforced disappearance of many children who have been recruited, which calls for intervention to promote truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence.

The communication was prepared by a group of lawyers and human rights defenders who work with Sam for Rights and Liberties. The report is based on information and testimonies of victims and eyewitnesses, documented by SAM, and includes dozens of depositions taken from children of victims of recruitment in Yemen.

I. Introduction

1. Yemen has suffered civil war since September 2014, following the armed coup led by the Houthi group "Ansar Allah" in alliance with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Human rights violations have significantly increased after the military intervention led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the country since late March 2015, while impunity is still effectively present in severe crimes (war crimes, crimes against humanity) and violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law committed by various parties to the conflict, including their policy on child recruitment.
2. The parties to the conflict have been pursuing a policy of recruiting children into the conflict since its outbreak in 2014, when thousands of children found themselves engaged in the hostilities on the front lines due to poverty and tribal mentality. The phenomenon of child recruitment began to spread and expand since the start of the conflict between the legitimate government and the Houthi rebels in 2014, when thousands of children were involved in direct hostilities, beginning with the war waged by the Houthi group against the Hajur Al-Sham tribes in Hajjah Governorate in early 2012, then on the war in Dammaj in Saada Governorate during the year 2013. The recruitment policy increased more rapidly in 2014. After the Houthi militia took over the capital, Sana'a, and expanded its battles in the rest of the governorates, it used complex patterns of forcibly recruiting children and engaging them in military operations to compensate for the human losses of confrontations with the Yemeni government forces, and later in the conflict with the Arab coalition forces led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.¹
3. Child recruitment before the outbreak of the current conflict, during the rule of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, was mainly confined to government forces. The defense sector at that time was one of the most stable state institutions. It provided fixed salaries, which prompted families to change their children's birth certificates to raise their age to 18, thus allowing them to enlist in the army and receive a salary. However, children did not necessarily participate in war military activities then.
4. Journalists in Yemen have reported that they have recently seen boys between fourteen and sixteen with rifles and pistols fighting for the Houthis and other armed groups. One journalist described seeing a seven-year-old boy at a Houthi checkpoint in Sana'a with a gun. Two local activists observing recruitments in Omran, 50 kilometers northwest of Sanaa, told Human Rights Watch that they saw up to 30 child soldiers at a Houthi center, including some boys as young as 12. Human Rights Watch interviewed boys in Imran who said they had fought or carried out other military missions for the Houthis. All the boys agreed that they volunteered, but four left the Houthis for various reasons, while two were wounded in the fighting.²

¹ Childhood militarization: a report documenting the Houthi group's recruitment of children in the armed conflict in Yemen. Sam for Rights and Freedoms and the Euro-Mediterranean, February 2021.

² Yemen: Houthis send children into the fight. Human Rights Watch, May 12, 2015.
[Yemen: Houthis Send Children Into Battle | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#).

5. An official recruiter in his late 30s told Human Rights Watch that he had been recruiting children for the Houthis in Imran for over a year. He added that children who didn't have military training do not participate in military operations but instead take on guard missions or carry ammunition and food to frontline fighters. They also recover dead and injured fighters and provide first aid. The official recruiter said he had intended to return to the front with two child soldiers, both 14, including his nephew. The nephew told Human Rights Watch that he joined the Houthis in May 2014 and is currently an armed guard. He was wounded in the chest last July during fighting between the Houthis and the Yemeni Army Brigade No. 310, but he recovered.³
6. The recruitment of children in Yemen is not limited to the Houthi Militia. Several local and international reports indicated the involvement of the Yemeni government and the Arab coalition forces in recruiting children, taking advantage of their families' urgent need for money, despite the Yemeni government signing an agreement with the United Nations in 2018 of a roadmap to stop the recruitment and use of children in the armed conflict in the country. In late September 2020, the International Group of Experts, in its third report presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council, monitored the recruitment of children within the Special Security Forces camp in Shabwa, which is loyal to the Yemeni government. They were used in hostilities in Abyan Governorate during May 2020, and the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council captured them. The report stated that forces loyal to the Yemeni government, the Arab coalition, or brokers are carrying out large-scale recruitment operations for children in Taiz, Lahj, and Abyan governorates and transporting them for training in Saudi camps to defend Saudi Arabia's borders from Houthi ground attacks.
7. This brief communication sheds light on the policy of child recruitment by parties to the conflict in Yemen, which witnessed a significant increase after the Houthi militia's coup against the legitimate government, which led to many students dropping out of schools, and being displaced or emigrated outside the country. But the most severe repercussions are the Houthi and Southern Transitional Council militia's recruitment of children. These militias are setting up camps to recruit children, documented by the media and reports submitted by Security Council envoys. Moreover, children are used by the Houthi militia and forced to participate in hostilities, where they are trained to fight or transport weapons and military equipment. Sometimes they are used to collect information on opponents in exchange for their basic needs, such as clothing, shelter, and food. A report submitted by the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, to the UN Security Council indicated that the international organization monitored the recruitment of children in Yemen into the ranks of the army and armed tribal groups, as well as by the Houthi group, Al-Qaeda, and Ansar al-Sharia.⁴
8. The communication is based on information documented by Sam Organization for Rights and Liberties. It contains examples collected by researchers and field monitors that consider the standards of transparency, impartiality, integrity, and objectivity. Sam's team was keen to reach the victims and obtain information from them through the field activity of the working group inside Yemen, which was able to document the facts by interviewing eyewitnesses and recording

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ UN report: Child recruitment in Yemen is on the rise. Al Arabiya, 17 June 2012.

their statements. The organization also used the available means of communication, received many communications, obtained many televised clips of the victims' accounts, and quoted some of what was broadcast by the media of the parties to the conflict, as well as the organization's team, used reliable open sources such as reports issued by international organizations and credible human rights reports.

II. Child Recruitment Policy in Yemen: Facts and Figures

9. There are no accurate statistics on the number of children recruited during the Yemeni war. As the UN estimates, these numbers vary. A report published in 2017 estimated the number of children recruited by the Houthi group at about 1,500. A statement by the Associated Press revealed that the Houthi group recruited about 18,000 children by the end of 2018. The Yemeni government's Ministry of Human Rights published figures indicating that the Houthi group has recruited about 30,000 children since 2014.⁵
10. Sam field research team has monitored the recruitment of 11,310 children in 19 governorates since 2014, including 6,269 children (8-11) years old, 580 children (12-14) years old, and 4461 children (15-17) years old (as detailed in the table, page 7 in its report on the militarization of childhood). According to Sam's report, Hajjah governorate comes at the forefront of the governorates with some (1875), followed by Sana'a governorate with some (1734), then Dhamar governorate with (1585), while Taiz governorate, which is divided between the parties to the conflict, comes in fourth place with some (1124), then the capital's secretariat with some (1097).⁶
11. The analysis conducted by Sam indicated that the economic factor plays a pivotal role in the involvement of children in hostilities, as 6126 children were recruited from families with no income, while there were 3194 children from low-income families, and 1990 children from middle-income families. According to Sam's data, the Houthi group topped the list of parties that recruit children, as it recruited 10,649 children. The legitimate government and its allies recruited 507 children, while extremist groups, including Al-Qaeda, recruited 54 children.
12. According to the information included in the report of international experts, the period from June 2015 to February 2020 witnessed the Houthis recruiting boys in all Yemeni governorates under the age of seven years, who were recruited in schools, poor and urban areas, and detention centers through indoctrination and financial incentives. They were used in the fighting, which led to the death of some and the injury of others. The recruitment of male children did not stop, as the Houthi group recruited 34 girls (between the ages of 13 and 17) from June 2015 to June 2020 to use them as informants, recruits, guards, medics, and members of what is known as "Zainabat," who are assigned the tasks of searching women and homes, indoctrinating women with the ideas of the Houthi group, as well as maintaining order in women's prisons.

⁵ Still on the Frontline: Recruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict in Yemen. Sam for Rights and Freedoms, February 2023.

⁶ *Ibid.*

III. Child Soldiers Policy: Causes and Consequences

13. The Panel of Experts on Yemen found that the Houthis continue to indoctrinate, recruit, and sometimes military train children in summer camps, particularly in Sana'a and Hudaydah governorates, and use children as combatants. These violations occurred despite the Houthis committed on April 18, 2022, to prevent and end the recruitment. The report showed that the Houthis follow the same methods and methods of recruiting children as the Houthi supervisors at the local community level recruit children, most of whom are from the age groups of 13 to 17 years, through coercion and threatening parents and teachers, offering material inducements and promises of martyrdom for children, and enrolling them in cultural and religious courses. Sectarianism based on the Houthi ideology.⁷
14. There are multiple reasons for the growth of child recruitment in Yemen during the war, which prompted the parties to the conflict, led by the Houthi group, to exploit children and turn them into fuel for a battle. The main reasons for the involvement of Yemeni children in the ongoing war include ideological background and cultural, social, financial, educational, and political factors.
15. The deterioration of the economic situation and the destruction of vital infrastructure because of the war contributed to the destruction of livelihoods, including those that depend on agriculture and fishing. Accordingly, involvement in armed conflict and related industries has become one of the primary sources of income in the country. That is why most child soldiers in Yemen come from low-income families and areas and are lured with money through a combination of coercion, salary solicitation, and propaganda, promises of a salary of 20,000 Yemeni riyals (about \$80), accommodation, and a daily supply of qat (chewing oral drug), tobacco, and other benefits. These temptations lead children to enlist to improve their families' economic situation and transfer some money back to their families.
16. In addition to the cultural traditions and norms that associate carrying a weapon with prestige and power, even for children, there is also a tendency in Yemeni culture to perceive a 15 or 16-year-old as an adult and no longer a child. Individuals are expected to work at this age, especially if they are already married and were victims of child marriage traditions.⁸
17. The major collapse of the education system, following the suspension of hundreds of schools, led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of students from them due to the war, which forced thousands of families to accept the recruitment of their children to improve their lives and secure new sources of income in light of the high rates of poverty and unemployment and the increase in the number of displaced persons to more than 3 million people, most of them Children and women lack a breadwinner and a source of livelihood. It also contributed to the tyranny of violence and hate speech, the glorification of war, and the dissemination of a culture

⁷ Letter dated February 21, 2023, from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council.

⁸ Afrah Nasser, Child Soldiers in Yemen... Unnecessary Weapons of War. Yemen Future - The Arab Center, Washington, DC, translated by Nahid Abdel-Aleem, February 3, 2023. <https://yemenfuture.net/researches/12980>

of fighting and death among adolescents in and outside schools by broadcasting songs and school cultural programs, introducing classes that glorify war slogans and symbols, broadcasting and consolidating convictions and ideas that undermine peace and coexistence and destroy common denominators.⁹

18. Facts show that education is the most influential factor in child recruitment, while the economic factor comes second, followed by political orientation third. The social aspect has played a vital role due to the decline in the part of the family, society, agencies, and human rights organizations about spreading awareness among innocent people of their rights. The destruction of the tribe's structure also contributed to making children easy prey for militias, mainly since the tribal culture in Yemen is employed in carrying arms in conflicts between tribes. Facts show that education is the most influential factor affecting child recruitment, while the economic factor comes second, followed by political orientation third. The social aspect has played a vital role due to the decline in the part of the family, society, agencies, and human rights organizations concerning spreading awareness among innocent people of their rights. The destruction of the tribe's structure also contributed to making children easy prey for militias, mainly since the tribal culture in Yemen is employed in carrying arms in conflicts between tribes.¹⁰
19. Laws put in place before the conflict to prohibit the recruitment of children, such as the Juvenile Welfare Law and the Child Rights Law, were found to be very fragile because they failed to deter child recruiters by imposing and enforcing substantial penalties.¹¹
20. The authors of the communication documented 17 camps affiliated with the Houthi group dedicated to training children to be recruited, 4 of which are in Al-Hodeida Governorate. The others are distributed in other governorates, such as Sana'a, Ebb, Thamar, Saada, and Amran. Children in these camps receive training in physical fitness, using light and medium weapons, and cultivation. Mines, throwing bombs and mortars, and these camps are supervised by the Ministry of Defense, affiliated with the Houthi group.¹² SAM has monitored many methods used by the Houthis and other parties to the conflict to attract children and lure them into recruitment, including:

A. Schools

21. Since controlling the capital, Sana'a, the Houthi group has been keen to place the Ministry of Education under its direct authority. It appointed Yahya Al-Houthi, brother of the group's founder, Hussein al-Houthi, as Minister of Education. The group thought and the matter applied to educational activities. According to the 2019 report of the Group of Experts, witnesses

⁹ Yemen's children fuel the Houthi war. Al Jazeera 12/20/2016.

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2016/12/20/%D8%A3%D8%B7%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%82%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86>

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Child soldiers in Yemen, *Ibid.*

¹² Still on the Frontline: Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Conflict in Yemen. *Ibid.*

provided additional information on the Houthis' recruitment methods and their indoctrination methods in schools. Another method used to recruit children is "indoctrination," the report added. In public and private schools, officers give regular lectures to children to encourage them to enlist to fight. One mother told the Group of Experts that she had nightmares about the future of her son, who, with other children in his class in Sana'a, saw pictures of dead children who had been dismembered. The Group of Experts received a first-hand account of a former teacher arrested for refusing to mobilize youth and cooperate in a campaign to recruit children in Amran. According to the witness, the Houthi armed group has a policy of child recruitment that is being systematically implemented.

B. Summer centers are a grotesque exploitation of childhood innocence.

22. The Houthi group announced a mobilizing policy for children in summer centers, and the number of enrollments in summer centers, according to a statement by the leader of the Houthi group, Hussein Al-Ezzy, on his Twitter account, reached 620,000 youth and children. Al-Ezzy confirmed that the number of enrollments exceeded the expected by 220,000 and that the capacity of the summer centers is 720,000. The Houthis have used "summer camps" to spread their sectarian ideology and recruit boys to fight. These camps are set up in schools and mosques around the Houthi-controlled part of Yemen, including the country's north and center and the capital, Sana'a. In this context, four aid workers from three international organizations operating in rebel-held areas said they had recently observed an intensification of the Houthis' efforts to recruit children. The Houthi ranks were thinned by losses on the battlefield, especially during a nearly two-year battle for control of the critical city of Marib. Aid workers spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing for their safety, and said their groups might be prevented from operating in Houthi-controlled territory. They added that the rebels pressured families to send their children to camps where they would learn how to handle weapons and lay mines in exchange for services, including food rations, from international organizations. One aid worker in the remote northern regions described seeing children as young as ten at checkpoints along the way, Kalashnikovs slung over their shoulders. Others are sent to the front line. He said the children had returned injured from the fighting in Ma'arb.¹³

23. Human Rights Watch interviewed a number of those who joined the Houthi camps. It confirmed that the Houthis began their recruitment by giving children ideological and Islamic training in the Zaydi Shiite sect for at least a month, followed by military training in one of their bases across the country. The children said they were not paid but were given food and qat, a plant commonly chewed in Yemen as a mild stimulant. Most had brought their weapons—military firearms are common among Yemeni families—but they were supplied with ammunition.¹⁴

C. Coercion and abduction

24. The Houthi group imposed on tribal sheiks and socially influential loyalists to prove their loyalty by mobilizing children to fight in the group's ranks. In many cases, children are kidnapped or

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Yemen - The Houthis send children into the fight. *Ibid.*

taken without their parents knowing. In the report, the Group of Experts confirms that children have been abducted and forced to join Houthi fighters. In other cases, children have either followed their fighting family members or individuals associated with the forces, following ideological training programs. On other occasions, children have joined the Houthis to support their families financially. Witnesses also stated that people are luring children to join the armed group in every neighborhood. In Sana'a, these people are members of the popular committees or claim to be members of the popular committees, which the de facto authorities have reported are officially part of the Houthi armed group. According to the report of the Group of Experts for the year 2020, paragraph (262), in poor areas in Sana'a and provincial capitals such as the city of Dhamar, kidnapping was a way to recruit some boys by Houthi supervisors. In some of the 11 verified cases, boys were kidnapped. For those who joined after accepting financial offers, their families, unaware of their whereabouts, deemed the children kidnapped.¹⁵

D. Peers and friends

25. Brothers and male cousins volunteered individually to avenge a boy's death or earn a similar salary. In an interview with «A.B., 15 years old, from the Al-Hawk Directorate in Al-Hodeida Governorate, said: "The Houthi group was active in the schools in our governorate, including mine, as the security and educational supervisors affiliated with the group visiting our school to attract and recruit students. They also participated in events organized in our school, such as advocacy for the Houthi group, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and others. I was one of the participants in these events, which made one of my Houthi supervisors approach me to recruit me with him. The supervisor was called "Abu Qaher," He recruited me into the Directorate's Security Department. He used to tell me he admired me for chanting their slogans enthusiastically. He added, "I continued to go to the Houthi Security Department, where I worked as a special companion to the supervisor in all his security campaigns. Later, I was numbered militarily, a chain with a specific number tied in the palm of those who joined the Houthi group; they also gave me what is known as a "certificate of entering heaven." After being given a military number, I dropped out of school and became a recruiter of wishes despite my young age, as that was in March 2020. And he continued, "After that, I joined the training, where I was trained to carry weapons and use them, and how to attack, withdraw and storm, as I was one of the initiators in carrying out the tasks assigned to us, and I took the initiative to perform the cry and announce it in any place or occasion, even in mosques after the prayer, or before and after the sermon. I worked in Al-Amniyat and protected points, and participated in military operations on the fronts of the governorates of Al-Jawf, Al-Hodeidah, and Ma'rib until the Yemeni army captured me. My family managed to get me out of captivity, and I am now living with my family in one of the displacement camps in the Ma'rib governorate.

E. Testimonies documented by Sam Organization

26. The authors of the communication documented dozens of facts confirming the children's recruitment by the Houthis, and other parties, during the battles they fought against government forces.

¹⁵ Still on the Frontline: Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Conflict in Yemen, *Ibid.*

A. Recruitment by the Houthi militia

27. Saif (a pseudonym), 13 years old, said: "We were in the school (Al-Ghadeer School). The Houthis came to the school and told us they would show us a demonstration against bin Salman and ISIS on Al-Masirah TV. So we went with them, but they took us a long distance to Al-Naqfa in Sa'ada. There we were trained to carry arms and strenuous physical exercises for about seven months, as we were 25 children. After that, I returned to my family for a week, and at the end of the week, the Houthis came again and took me to the Nehm front, and there I worked supplying the fighters with ammunition and food. We would climb the barricades, hide behind them, and crawl down. One day, my 15-year-old colleague, Ali, wanted to get off the barricade. He stood up, received a direct bullet in the forehead, and fell dead before me. After three months on the Nehm front, I returned home, and my family sent me with my brother's bride to Marib, and I never returned there.
28. Abdul Malik (a pseudonym), 15 years old, from Ebb / Al-Sabra governorate, says: "My friend (Sa'adoun) and I used to go daily to eat qat with a group of Ansar Allah fighters, and when Ramadan came, we stopped going for the first three days, and on the fourth day the Houthis came to the shop. They took us against our will and brought us to Hamza's camp, and there they trained us to carry weapons and do many physical exercises, and if we were late or short, they would beat us or shoot us near us. After the training, they transferred us to the Hamak front, between Ebb and Al-Dhalea, and there I fought for five months, after which I returned to my village armed. No one could beat me anymore, as was the case before. They began to fear me." He added, "I remember from the front that we killed many donkeys. The resistance used to put a lamp on the donkey and shoot it in the valley, and we used to seize any light, and whenever the morning came, we would discover that we had killed a donkey. After the leader's killing, my big brother took me against my will and brought me to Marib. I am now in the ninth grade. The school year will end soon, and I will return to fight with the Mujahideen of Ansar Allah.
29. Mujahid (a pseudonym), 12 years old, was displaced from Sa'ada Governorate to Amran Governorate during the second war that took place between the Yemeni army and militias, as his father was sick and disabled due to a mine explosion, which caused him to lose his leg and arm. And when the militias took control of the Omran governorate, they attracted many children. The child "Amjad" was affected by seeing other children carrying weapons, so he wanted to imitate these children and told his mother that he had found a job and that he would start tomorrow, but his mother doubted the matter and said I work instead of you. But he chose the time of dawn to flee from the house with other children who were convinced of the necessity of jihad and weapons so that his mother and his family would wake up to the news of his going with the Houthi group as he joined the Houthi militia in January 2020, only to return as a dead body in May 2020 AD, amid grief for his family and neighbors.
30. Saad (a pseudonym), 17 years old, from the village of Bani Hour, Maswar Amran district, is an orphan, and his family consists of a mother, a brother, and two sisters. Studying in the ninth grade, he left school, which affected his family as his mother cried a lot that day; she found out

that her son had left them and gone with the Houthi group. She went to look for him in the Houthi centers in Omran, and she did not find him. She cried more when Saad's colleagues came with his seat number to prepare for the ministerial exams in August 2020, but they did not find him, as they told his mother, this is your son's seat number for the exams after a week. On the second day, specifically on August 16, 2020, the news of her son's death spread, confirming his mother's intuition that he would not return home and would not be tested in the basic certificate.

31. Sakhr (a pseudonym), 14 years old, from Ebb Governorate / Al-Hazm, was recruited by the supervisor of the Houthi group (Jamal Al-Hamiri) and sent to the battle fronts, where the child "Sakhr" was taken and lured with pension and weapons while he was still studying in the sixth grade. Recruitment of three other children who were brought to Dhamar in preparation for their transfer to the battlefronts as part of the Houthi group's ongoing campaign to recruit children. According to the witness, Hussein, a pseudonym for the "Sam" organization, he testified that "he saw them taking the child Sakhr to be recruited by the Houthi group, and he was taken And a group of people from the region to support the fighting fronts in Dhamar.
32. Hamza (a pseudonym), 12 years old, from the Al-Asakra region - Jabal Ras - Al-Hodeidah, was recruited with his brother by the supervisor of the Houthi group called "Muhammad Abdul Hafez Al-Ghabban" (Abu Najran), the deputy supervisor of the directorate, nicknamed (Abu Karbala). They were recruited with many children by temptation, promises of monthly salaries, or terrorizing them and their families under the pretext of fighting ISIS. The victim was forcibly recruited without his parents' permission, and he received training and preparation in one of the militia training camps. The victim is still present at the Dabbas front. The deputy general supervisor of the Houthis took him. He was trained with the militias, which brought him to the battle fronts in the Dabbas front to fight ISIS, as they say, because of poverty, need, fear, and terrorism.
33. Qasim (a pseudonym), 15 years old, from the Al-Makharesha village, located in Bani Nof, Al-Madan District, Amran Governorate, left the classroom at Al-Jeel Al-Jadeed School in Al-Madan and went to attend a cultural course after receiving temptations and promises of employment in the Central Security Forces. This was on 12/18/2017, and he sat in Sana'a for about a week and did not communicate with his family. Then he moved to Dhamar Governorate for training and was promised not to go to the front. After a week of training in a deserted and unknown place, he was sent with about 15 children and a group of young people to Sana'a Governorate (Dabua, Nihm district). After that, he was removed from the confrontation and sent to the rear so that he could flee and escape until he returned to his country and decided not to believe any Houthi or supervisor and returned to his study seat. And he was threatened not to speak or disclose the secrets of God's supporters, and if he did, he would not blame anyone but himself.

B. Recruitment by the government

34. Despite the difference in the use of children in military actions by the parties, the Houthi group topped the list in terms of the percentage and number of child recruits, government forces with all their factions participated in this crime, and the Group of Eminent Experts documented several incidents committed by government forces.
35. In 2015 and 2016, the southern resistance recruited dozens of children in Aden. A former child soldier told the Group of Experts he was recruited at 12. The child said his father allowed him to work at a checkpoint but not to participate in military operations. The child said, "The checkpoint was located behind the front line, about 200 meters away on the Aqaba Road, where 10 of my friends were patrolling. The child added, "My role was to search people's clothes and bags, especially women. I heard shooting and felt explosions daily, but our checkpoint was not directly targeted. It was my responsibility to find collaborators and Houthis. On one occasion, a woman searched and found money and bombs. The report adds that the team of experts received compelling evidence about the "forced" and "voluntary" recruitment of at least 27 children under 13 by the Yemeni Armed Forces and the UAE-backed Security Belt.¹⁶
36. They were recruited by the Security Belt and the Giants Brigades to participate in the military operation in Hodeida in 2018. According to the information gathered by the Group of Experts, five children died, and five others were injured. Among the five children killed, a 16-year-old child was recruited. He was about to return home by the end of December 2018 as he received his salary, and the parties agreed to a ceasefire. Still, the child's father received his son's body on December 24 after being hit with a 23mm bullet in the stomach. The father told the team of experts about this experience: "My son was dead... The 10th Brigade brought him to the hospital. I examined the body and saw that he had been shot with a 23mm caliber in his stomach.
37. The Security Belt and Giants Brigades recruited three child soldiers aged 14, 15, and 17. They reported participating in the attack in Mocha and the Hodeida offensive. One of the interviewees mentioned the following: "I never imagined that I would join the armed forces or the army. My dream was to become a teacher... When the Houthis fell, I decided to look for a job in any way to help my family with household expenses. Prices rose, and my father's salary was not enough. At the beginning of 2016, I decided to join the army, and my relatives helped me because most of them were in the army, and I was about 15 years old. I joined the army and went to training in Aden for four months. One of those recruited in Abyan, at the age of 15, explained that the recruitment was done mostly by a person in the village responsible for such matters (who was not named), but he was also "urged to join the forces" by friends and relatives. The child was taken directly to the front line. He remembers it because it was his "first battle," and he saw many deaths.¹⁷
38. The Group of Experts interviewed three witnesses who told of the recruitment of a 14-year-old boy by the Shabwa Elite Forces in Shabwa in September 2018 as part of a conscription campaign.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The child was killed in January 2019 during a raid on a village in Al Hajar, Shabwa Governorate. Sources reported that the Shabwa Elite Forces recruited at least four children under 16 in January 2019. In February 2019, a 17-year-old boy, recruited early in 2018 in Taiz, was killed by a landmine near the northern border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. His family told the Group of Experts that he was recruited through the Resistance Forces/Yemen Armed Forces, which he joined from Al-Hawban. The family informed the Group of Experts that the boy's identity card clearly showed his age. Other sources told the Group of Experts that the Yemeni armed forces check identity cards and birth certificates.

IV: Legal framework: the legality of child recruitment in armed conflicts

39. Armed conflict poses a particular threat to children. Despite the special protection afforded to children by law, they are still vulnerable to recruitment by the regular armed forces and armed groups. To prevent child recruitment, international humanitarian law guarantees special protection as a sensitive group with special needs in armed conflicts.
40. The national armed forces and armed militias usually recruit children. This phenomenon constitutes a severe humanitarian problem, mainly in Yemen. Children being recruited are used to actively participate in hostilities and perform supportive tasks in gathering intelligence and transporting supplies, which exposes them to many risks.

International Human Rights Law

41. Although international human rights law is primarily binding on states, it is accepted among international jurists that when non-state armed groups exercise government functions or de facto control over a territory or population, they are required to respect and protect the human rights in areas under its control. Therefore, Houthis and other armed groups must respect international human rights standards in areas under their effective control.¹⁸
42. International human rights law prohibits recruiting children during armed conflicts. The Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 sets the child's age at fifteen as a minimum. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in May 2000, is one of the essential documents that guarantee the protection of the right of children from being forced to participate in armed conflicts. It culminated the efforts made throughout the 1990s to raise the minimum age for child recruitment from fifteen to eighteen years. However, progress has been slow. UN Security Council Resolution 1612, which establishes a mechanism for follow-up, reporting, and compliance, indicates that this agenda still needs much work - especially since most of the egregious violations are committed among non-state actors.
43. The protocol included important provisions determining the age of compulsory or voluntary recruitment. It deals with child recruitment children into armed groups differently from the state's armed forces. The state armed forces shall not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of eighteen years. The States Parties shall take all feasible

¹⁸ Letter dated 21 February 2023 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council.

measures to prevent such recruitment and use, including adopting the necessary legal steps to prohibit and criminalize these practices.

44. Yemen is a state party to the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Accordingly, the Yemeni Child Law No. 45 of 2002 stipulated in Article (149) that persons under eighteen shouldn't be recruited in armed conflicts. A report by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in April 2012, in part on Yemen, indicates that Yemeni law is clear that children must not be recruited into military conflicts. Therefore, the parties to the conflict in Yemen must fulfill Yemen's international obligations and refrain from recruiting children, as this policy violates international human rights standards.

International Humanitarian Law

45. The Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the involvement of children under 15 in hostilities. It states that "the compulsory or voluntary recruitment of children into armed forces or groups shall be a war crime in any armed conflict." This point was also enshrined in the Statute of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. In 2000, the Optional Protocol on the Rights of the Child raised the minimum age for recruitment and direct participation in conflict to 18 years. Since 2002, 123 countries have ratified the Protocol. However, progress has been slow. UN Security Council Resolution 1612, which establishes a mechanism for follow-up, reporting, and compliance, indicates that this agenda still needs much work - especially since most of the egregious violations are committed among non-state actors.
46. The two additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1977 dealt with the first international treaties that sought to address this issue, as the first protocol related to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts stipulates the prohibition of the recruitment of children under the age of fifteen and their involvement in hostilities. The protocol also specifies that if children who have reached the age of fifteen and have not reached the age of eighteen are recruited into armed conflicts, priority shall be given to older children.¹⁹
47. Article 77(2) of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions stipulates that "The Parties to the conflict shall take all feasible measures so that children who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities and, in particular, they shall refrain from recruiting them into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, the Parties to the conflict shall endeavor to give priority to those who are the oldest. Article 4 of Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions stipulates, among others, "children who have not attained the age of fifteen years shall neither be recruited in the armed forces or groups nor allowed to take part in hostilities; The special protection provided by this Article to children who have not attained the age of fifteen years shall remain applicable to them if they take a direct part in hostilities despite the provisions of subparagraph c) and are captured.

¹⁹ Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts.

48. The prohibition includes states and armed groups distinct from the state's national forces, as the protocol prohibits these forces from recruiting or using those under eighteen, under any circumstances, in hostilities. This prohibition applies to all armed forces groups. Countries in which such groups exist must take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment or use, including adopting the necessary legal steps to prohibit and criminalize these practices. The Optional Protocols also requires states to take all measures to ensure children's release from their armed forces. States Parties shall take all possible steps to ensure the demobilization of persons recruited or used in hostilities within the scope of their jurisdiction in a manner not inconsistent with this Protocol.²⁰
49. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of July 17, 1998, which entered into force on July 1, 2002, stipulates that forcing or recruiting children under the age of fifteen and enlisting them in the armed forces or armed groups in both international and non-international armed conflicts amount to war crime (Articles 8-2b(vi) and 8-2e(vii)). It also stipulates that under certain circumstances, the Court has jurisdiction to try the perpetrators of these crimes (Article 8-2-b -26 and Article 8-2-e-7).

IV. Recommendations:

A. The Houthi group

- Kindly ask the Houthis to immediately and unconditionally stop the policy of recruiting and exploiting children in hostilities, as this poses a significant danger to their lives and future and constitutes a gross violation of their rights guaranteed in relevant local and international conventions and norms.
- Kindly ask the Houthis to disclose the number of child soldiers they have and to demobilize all child soldiers immediately.
- Kindly ask Request the Houthis to fulfill all of Yemen's obligations concerning respecting and applying international human rights standards and the rules of international humanitarian law that prohibit the recruitment of children.
- Kindly ask the Houthis to close all camps and mobilization centers used to recruit children intellectually and motivate them to fight.
- Kindly ask the Houthis to immediately stop the media discourse that incites hatred and violence and not to exploit educational institutions, school curricula, or activities that glorify and call for fighting.

²⁰ Muhammad Al-Nadi, Child Soldiers under International Humanitarian Law. <https://caus.org.lb/en/child-soldiers-under-international-humanitarian-law/>

- Kindly request the Houthis to investigate all crimes committed against child victims of recruitment and hold accountable all those involved in child recruitment in the armed conflict.

B. The legitimate government of Yemen

- Kindly request the legitimate government of Yemen to immediately stop recruiting children and exploiting them in hostilities or security actions as a severe violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights standards.
- Kindly ask the legitimate government of Yemen to disclose the number of child soldiers they have and to demobilize all child soldiers immediately.
- Kindly request the legitimate government of Yemen to fulfill all of Yemen's obligations under international human rights conventions and the rules of international humanitarian law.
- Kindly ask the legitimate government of Yemen to issue legislation that increases punishment for those involved in recruiting children and using them in hostilities.
- Kindly ask the legitimate government of Yemen to open rehabilitation centers for children involved in the fighting before returning them to their families and reintegrating them into society.
- Kindly ask the legitimate government of Yemen to open an investigation with all those involved in child recruitment crimes as a prelude to holding them accountable.
- Kindly ask the legitimate government of Yemen to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.